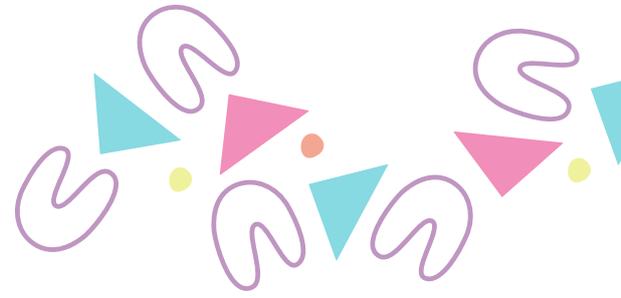




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SERVING CHILDREN, FAMILIES & COMMUNITIES



Fostering Matters

Your guide to becoming a Foster Carer





We are

Key Assets Australia

Key Assets Australia has been operating in Australia since 2007 and is connected with the Martin James Foundation, an international not-for-profit organisation. We share our knowledge and experience which is mutually beneficial.

During this time we have developed a strong reputation as an innovative leader in the child and family welfare sector.

As a not-for-profit we are passionate about delivering outstanding services that enable all children and families to achieve their potential.

We can draw on our group's wealth of knowledge, safeguarding and child protection practice, therapeutic models of intervention, academic research and qualitative programs to continually strive to improve the support and services we offer our carers and families.

When we meet and talk with foster and kinship carers across Australia where Key

Assets Australia (KAA) operates, we hear such powerful stories that motivate people to become carers. We are always inspired by the positive impact that our carers have on the lives of each and every child or young person in their care.

Good caring requires preparation, training, and assistance from your support team to stay connected. Celebrating the big and the small wins together with your friends and family.

We look forward to supporting you on your carer journey, creating positive and lasting outcomes for children, young people and families together.



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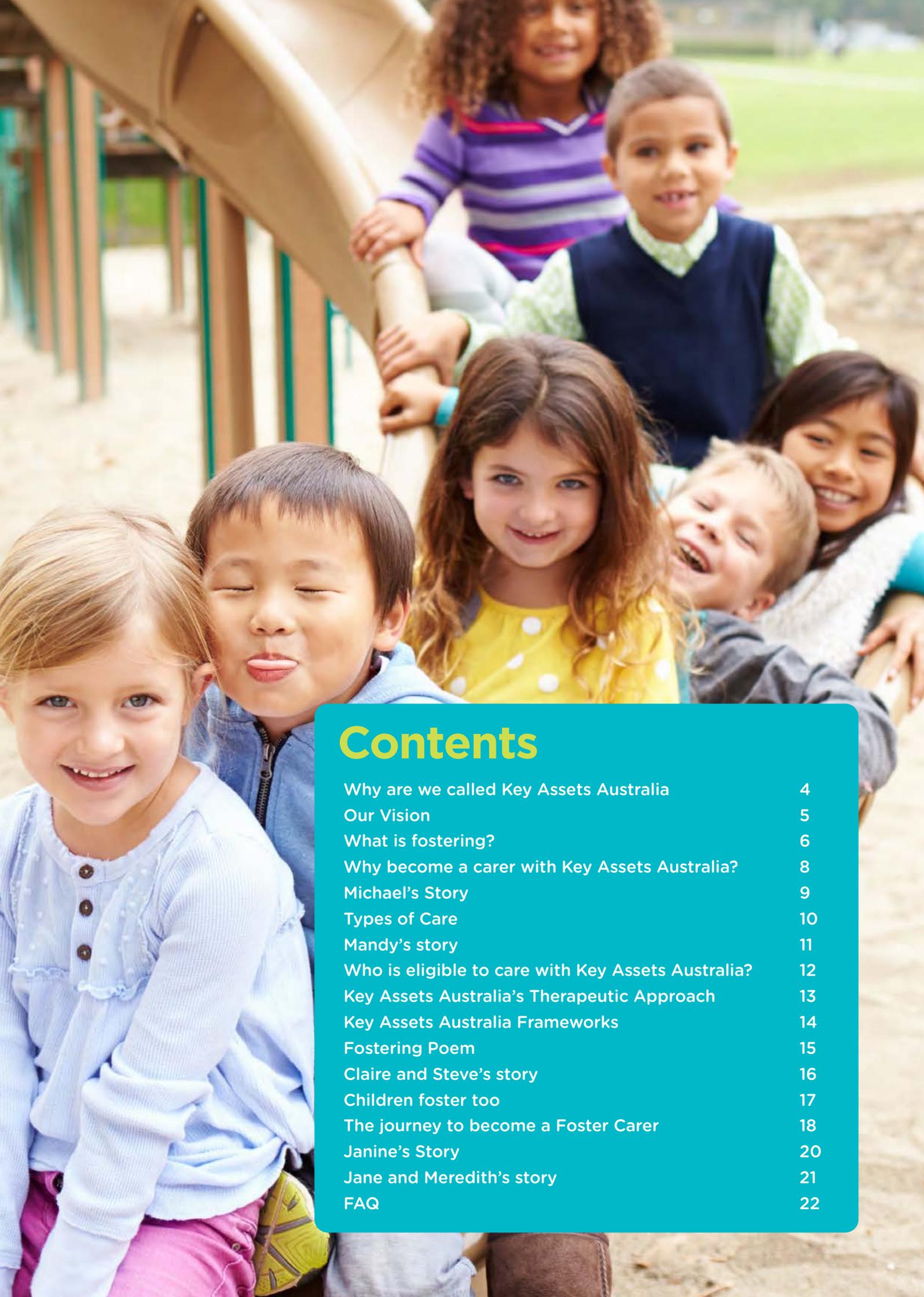
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Important Considerations about this document

To protect the privacy and confidentiality of children and young people, all names in this document have been changed, and stock images are used in the stories shared. These stories aim to reflect the experiences and impact of foster care without revealing personal information. Throughout this document, "Kids in care" refers to children and young people in foster care; "Carer" refers to foster carers, who provide support and care for these children and young people; "KAA" stands for Key Assets Australia.





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Why are we called Key Assets Australia?

The name 'Key Assets' reflects our belief that carers are the agents of change for children in their care and, therefore, each of our carers is a 'Key Asset'.

Good carers nurture a child's or young person's strength and resilience to grow. Carers can and do make a positive contribution to supporting children in achieving their potential.

We believe children and young people should have the opportunity to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy life and achieve their goals.

Our logo mirrors our purpose by a structured geometric pattern that repeats and strengthens each time a new piece is added. Each colour and piece represents the diversity of our services as well as the contribution each individual makes. The "heart shape" of our logo reinforces the message that people are at the very "heart" of what we do and why we exist.

The gap in the heart reminds us that no matter how far we have come there is always more we can do. Key Assets Australia continues to be committed to finding the solution to complete the shape.

Our culture and core values make us Key Assets Australia:

- ▲ Recognising everybody counts and is accountable.
- ▲ Providing high quality and safe services.
- ▲ Achieving excellence through continuous improvement.
- ▲ Cultivation of knowledge, innovation and learning.



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All children and young people thrive and connect to family, community and culture.

The vision of what matters to young people in care.



STRATEGIC ROADMAP

2025 - 2030

Our plan for the next 5 years, from the perspective of children and young people.





What is fostering?

Our dedicated carers look after children and in some situations will work to reunite them with their families. Where this is not possible, carers often provide long-term family-based care and will help children move on to independent living.

Why do children come into care?

Children and young people may come into care as a result of a parent's illness, relationship problems, family breakdown or a situation where their well-being is not secure.

Many of them will have experienced neglect and physical, emotional or sexual abuse, and all will have faced loss and separation from their birth family.

Children in care may express their feelings through their behaviour and emotions. Some may be clingy or may experience outbursts of big emotion. Others will be withdrawn and find it difficult to build trusting relationships with adults. Even if they seem happy and smiling, their past will almost certainly have an impact on their experience, behaviour and development.

Our purpose is to achieve positive and lasting outcomes for children, families and communities.





Why become a carer with Key Assets Australia?

We believe that our carers have the opportunity to cherish children and young people, help them to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy life and achieve their goals.

As a carer with Key Assets Australia you will be part of a community that:

- Values the role of the carer and family
- Places the carer and the child at the centre of practice
- Commits to working alongside carers
- Provides tailored support from a dedicated Social Worker
- Focuses on supporting carers through training
- Is inclusive and welcomes children, young people and carers from the LGBTQIA+ communities
- Is welcoming of all faiths and religions that value and respect children or young people's rights to choose their beliefs.

We will achieve our purpose by upholding the following pledges:

CHILDREN & FAMILIES

1. Set high **standards** for ourselves and the **care** and **support** we provide for you
2. Be on your side and **accept** you for who you are and what you want to be
3. Prioritise your **safety**, connections and build your **resilience**
4. Be **passionate**, **caring** and **respectful** in everything that we do
5. **Listen** to and **learn** from you so that we can do things better

CUSTOMERS, CARERS AND STAFF

1. Deliver **excellence** through **quality** service provision, **collaboration** and **measuring outcomes**
2. Act with **honesty** and **transparency**
3. Deliver **innovative** services in **cost effective** ways
4. **Challenge** the norm, ask questions and keep our promises
5. Conduct our business with financial **integrity** to achieve sustainability and **value**

COMMUNITIES

1. Build a **socially responsible** and **friendly** presence in each of our communities
2. Value **diversity** and **inclusion** and act with **cultural sensitivity** and **respect**
3. Be **creative** and **flexible** to respond to each community's unique **needs**
4. Recruit, train, support and retain the best **people** to deliver services
5. Contribute to **shared** learning through **research** and **partnerships**

Michael's Story



What's it like to be a child in foster care?

My name is Michael and I've been in care since I was eight years old, I'm 17 years old now and I've been with Key Assets Australia (KAA) since I was 14 years old.

I'm in foster care because my mum and dad didn't look after me well; it wasn't safe for me to live with them, so I came into foster care. I was very angry, and I found it really hard to trust adults. I've had a lot of different foster homes some of which I stayed a few days, others a few weeks or a few months.

I think it's 'cool' being with KAA because everyone listens to you and you get to know all the staff, as well as the other kids and their carers. Another kid told me that

he felt safe with KAA and they put on good activities which are always lots of fun. The staff are nice people. You don't feel like you are on your own in care with KAA and the social workers don't have 50 kids to look after which means you get lots more attention and support.

I was a bit worried when I moved in with my carers but now I would say, enjoy and embrace it, don't worry because carers at KAA take notice of you, as do the staff. I'd say to kids coming into care not to be scared as you will feel like a normal person and not a "care kid". My carers didn't tell everyone I was in care and they gave me the choice of whether to tell the neighbours or not, it was my choice and I felt like they listened to me. That shows that they put me first!

"I'd say to children coming into care not to be scared as you will feel like a normal person and not a care kid."





Types of Care

All children and young people are unique, so the care they require is different as well.

Emergency

Sometimes, we need to find a safe place for a child to stay at very short notice. Emergency care can be for a few nights, to a few weeks. Sometimes emergency care is needed in the middle of the night or on weekends.

Short-term or Restoration Care

Short-term care can be anything from a few months to two years. These arrangements are made for children for whom the plan is to return home to their families. Often carers assist the child's family to make the changes they need to be able to safely resume care of their child.

Permanent or Long Term Care

It isn't always possible for children to be returned to their families, so they'll need to stay in care until they reach the age of 18 years. This is the age young people usually

leave care, however, all states now offer the option to remain in care for a few years longer, so that they are mature enough and have the skills and supports required for them to safely live independently.

Children with Disabilities

There are many children and young people with disabilities who need a caring family. This can include children with physical or learning disabilities, sensory needs or a combination of these.

Occasional or Respite Care

Caring does not have to be full-time. Occasional carers look after a child on weekends or for a few days while their regular carer has a break. It can be difficult for a child to go to different people so we try to arrange for the child always to go to the same carer so they can get to know each other.

Mandy's story

Mandy has two grown-up children of her own, she now fosters with Key Assets Australia and is currently caring for two sisters.

Mandy is a single mother to her two children, Sarah and Mason. Sarah is 23 and Mason is 21 and they both still live at home with Mandy, along with Mandy's mother who is 76 years old.

The family have two sisters. Emily (8 years) and Claire (6 years) that they foster with Key Assets Australia. They came to live with them upon her approval as a carer.

Mandy describes her family as close, affectionate and musical. She says they are all extremely trusting of each other, laid back and work together as a team.

Thinking back on her time before becoming a foster carer, Mandy remembers it being a simpler time, much quieter and less busy. She previously worked in a pharmacy and in aged care. She came to a cross roads in her life deciding whether to continue in aged care or apply to be a foster carer. After reading books and having discussions with friends about the topic she decided to enquire about fostering with Key Assets Australia.

She explains how she found there was a lot to learn as a new foster carer.

"I soon learnt that if you are able to commit for long enough, the rewards you get back are priceless."

Speaking about the foster children she cared for, "It took Emily around 3 months to settle, and Claire a little more than 8 months."

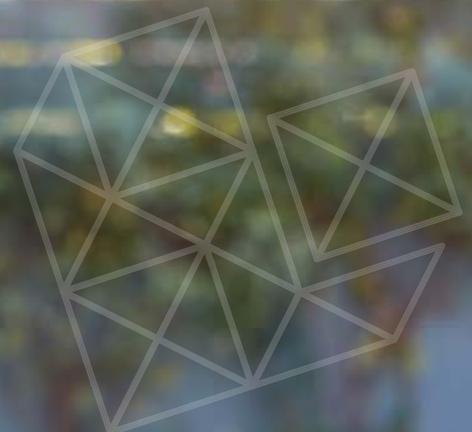
Mandy feels the most important aspect of fostering for her is providing a home with unconditional love. She said it's amazing when you begin to realise how much you can mean to a child.

"The biggest reward is to see them grow and develop. To see their confidence improve in such a short amount of time."

Mandy knew that she was making a difference when Claire said to her one day- "I knew you loved me when you kept telling me you were really proud of me".



"I knew you loved me when you kept telling me you were really proud of me." - Claire (6 years)



Who is eligible to care with Key Assets Australia?

At KAA, the carer, whether single or in a relationship, needs to be available to meet the individual needs of the child or young person and have a connection with them.

We focus on your ability to:

- provide a safe, caring and supportive environment for children and young people
- to work as part of a team and the local legislation.

We welcome enquiries from people from all cultures, sexual orientation and gender identities. Carers can rent or own their own home, be married, partnered or single. A carer is required to have an appropriate space for children and young people.

Our preference is for children to have their own bedroom and we can assess if it is suitable for children to share, for example, a sibling group.

Being a carer takes commitment, enthusiasm and a genuine desire to make a positive and lasting difference.

Once approved, KAA Carers experience the satisfaction of knowing that they support the child to remain connected to their family, culture and community.



Key Assets Australia's Therapeutic Approach

Recognising the importance of carers is a primary focus at Key Assets Australia (KAA) so that they can provide the best care to children and young people.

We offer the following supports:

1. Therapeutic support - Our staff are skilled and knowledgeable in the needs of children who have experienced trauma. We have therapists who can support children or carers directly.
2. Out-of-hours support - We provide KAA carers with 24 hours 7 days a week on-call service with one of our KAA social workers.
3. Carer buddy - KAA carers can be matched with a mentoring carer in their area to provide additional support and guidance.
4. Support workers - A pool of workers that may be utilised for additional support.
5. Respite - All full-time KAA carers are encouraged to access respite care.
6. External counselling and support are available when needed.
7. Financial support - A carer allowance is provided.
8. Carer Training - Online and face-to-face training arranged to meet the needs of KAA carers plus access to child specific resources.
9. Cultural Practice Lead - to provide support to carers to meet the cultural needs of First Nations People.
10. Carer Events - Family days for KAA carers with their children and activity days just for the children to give the carers a break in the holidays.
11. Carers' coffee mornings - We offer regular groups for KAA carers to get together and connect with each other, these can be offered online.
12. Recognition and awards - KAA likes to acknowledge achievements, milestones and anniversaries of KAA carers and children.
13. We consult with KAA carers regularly so we can constantly improve the services we provide including carer reviews, regular carer surveys and carer groups.



The Key Assets Australia Frameworks

The Framework for Excellence

KAA believes children everywhere deserve excellent care and this framework outlines the overarching aims and outcomes which we hope will be achieved for all children placed in our care. We are committed to working together with our children, our birth families, our fostering families, the Department and other significant partners to strive for excellence, to build resilience and a sense of belonging for all children growing up in foster care.

The Key2Care Practice Framework

KAA introduced the Key2Care Framework to improve the way we work with KAA carers through their fostering journey. The Key2Care Framework will give more structure to the way social workers and carers collaborate to work on things that matter to them and so achieve the best outcomes for their families and the children they care for.

The Key Care Team

A team approach that achieves the best outcomes for children and young people in care. The Key Care Team Model is made up of the necessary and important services and people who work collaboratively to create a nurturing, caring and therapeutic environment to achieve safety, stability and well-being for the child.





Fostering poem



f is for having lots of **fun**
o is for **o**ffering children a place
s is for **s**haring things with each other
t is for **t**reasuring the time we have spent together
e is for **e**very child is different in every special way
r is for **r**emembering the first to last day
i is for **i**gnoring the bad and remembering the good
n is for **n**ever forgetting
g is for **g**etting everybody to be a family again

Poem by Courtney, Age 11
A child in care



“To see Luke smile and at peace is worth everything.”

Claire and Steve’s story

Claire and Steve started as foster carers when they fostered Luke, a 12 year old boy.

“Our lives as foster carers began a couple of years ago after we saw an advert that had been placed in our local newspaper by an agency looking to recruit new foster carers. They were called Key Assets Australia.

We had been talking a lot about looking into fostering and it was just by chance that we saw this particular ad, it must have been fate. The following day we called the number and arranged to meet a social worker to have an informal chat”

“We decided that we had a lot to offer a child that, through no fault of their own, was unable to live with their birth family”

“As first-time carers, we knew there would be a lot to learn. The wrap-around support network offered by Key Assets Australia gave us the confidence we needed.

When we became carers – we joined the Key Assets Australia family as well. A short time later we had our first child come to live with us. We were so excited, our family had expanded by one, a 12-year-old boy called Luke with a mischievous sense of humour and a smile to melt your heart.”

“Our first 12 months together was a rollercoaster”

“We had many highs and lows and what we found different was that, when you foster all of what we prepared for during the assessment process suddenly became real. That’s when Key Assets Australia gave us the support and encouragement to know that

things would be better. They provided us with the opportunity for some time alone so we could look after ourselves as well. They listened to us and gave us advice on how to respond to his needs, all of which were new to us.

Since then, what a difference. Looking back we realise that it takes time for a child to begin to trust you, they have been through so much in their short lives. We had to learn to not take things personally, it really wasn’t us he was upset at, we just represented the adults in his life that had let him down in the past. Now two years on, at the dinner table I often get, ‘Claire, you can sit next to me if you like’, and he often helps me prepare the meal and clean up afterwards. We have learned that consistency and routine play a vital role in caring for Luke.”

“Luke is now settled and happy and talks of his long-term future with us”

“We are now family and he is treated like family, he often tells us he loves us and we tell him we love him. To hear his laughter and joy is priceless and to see Luke smile and at peace is worth everything.

We hope that our story gives you a glimpse of the difference you can make to children and their lives. There is no magic formula, just plain old patience, kindness and sincerity.”

Children foster too



What will life be like for your children in a fostering family?

Becoming a fostering household can be a life-changing experience for everyone in the home. Your children will share their home, their parents, their siblings and belongings with the children and young people coming to live with you. They play a vital role in the success of caring, and we will help you in supporting them.

KAA will ensure that your children have access to support from your worker and contact with other young people in the area who are also part of a fostering family. There are opportunities where your children can discuss the issues affecting them and take part in activities together.



Kerrie's story

Kerrie grew up in a fostering family between the ages of 5 and 19, and her parents have cared for over 100 children and young people as emergency and short term carers.

“Fostering, for me, was an adventure. It wasn't just Mum and Dad who were involved; my brother, sister, and I were all part of it in various ways. It felt like having an extended family, with extra brothers and sisters.

Like any family, some days we all got along, and other days we didn't, but my strongest memories are of the good times. Some mornings, we would wake up to find a new face peeking out from the bedroom across from ours. As we got older, we'd sometimes find empty beds where a foster child had left without saying goodbye.

The hardest part of fostering has to be when someone you really like or care about leaves. Don't get me wrong, this wasn't the case with every child we fostered, but I can remember a few in particular who felt like I'd lost someone close.

When I was 10 years old, we fostered a baby from birth. He stayed with us until he was 18 months old; he was like my little brother, and we were part of his family. Everything ended well—he moved back to his family, and we still saw him regularly. This happened with many of the children and young people who stayed with us. We're still in touch with someone who lived with us 15 years ago.”



The journey to becoming a Foster Carer

Receiving this booklet is just the first stage in the process of becoming approved as a carer. The diagram shows the 'journey' that you will follow:

1

Call us or log onto our website keyassets.org.au to register your interest in caring with Key Assets Australia.

2

A Key Assets worker will visit your home to answer any questions, check your home is suitable and help you to make an informed decision about becoming a carer with us.

3

You will attend training which covers all responsibilities, and obligations and to support you to develop as a carer.

4

A qualified assessor will carry out a full assessment of your household's suitability to be a carer. They will visit your home 4-6 times to collect information about you, your family and any skills and experience you have that will help you with fostering.

6

If your household is authorised/approved, we will begin to match children to your experience and best fit for your family.

5

After your assessment, all relevant checks and references are completed, we'll present your information to an authorisation panel.



The assessment process usually takes from 3-6 months, depending on factors such as your availability to attend training and assessor visits.

Key Assets Australia is committed to keeping your personal information safe in line with the Privacy Act 1988. Ask for our information sheet if you would like to know more about our commitment to you.



You'll need to provide us with:

- ▲ A medical questionnaire completed by your GP.
- ▲ A minimum of 3 referees who know you and your family well.
- ▲ If you are in employment, a reference from your employer.
- ▲ School references will be completed for all children living in the household.
- ▲ Ex-partner references, if safe to do so, are required when there is shared care of a child under 18 years old.

The following checks will be carried out during the assessment process:

- ▲ National Police Clearance and background check on all adult members of the household and any adult regular visitors.
- ▲ All adult members of the family and regular visitors to the household will need to apply for a Working with Children Check.
- ▲ Standard Safety compliance check on your home
- ▲ If you have lived overseas we may undertake an overseas criminal history check.





Janine's Story

My household consists of my foster son Jason, myself and my partner (Ash) who we see on weekends. We really enjoy taking Jason to various outings, whether it is a day at the park or the beach. We always try to become involved in any activities Jason is interested in. I also have three beautiful grown-up children (not living at home) and two amazing respite carers, who are so much more than that.

I became a foster carer 5 years ago, it was something I had always wanted to do. I was approached by a family friend who wanted her child, to go to a family member. When she asked me, I was very happy to say yes and I knew I would need support to meet his cultural needs.

I decided to care for Key Assets Australia as I liked the fact that they can see the potential in someone who doesn't always 'fit the mould'.

It took time for Jason to settle and for me to understand how to meet all of his emotional needs. I thought if I loved him as much as I did, he would feel the same. It was so special

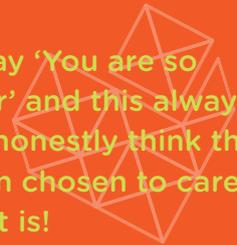
when we made progress and he started to trust me. When I talk with my social worker, we often reflect on how far we have come and celebrate our successes.

Jason has become a valuable member of my family, he still sees his birth family regularly as they love him too. We talk about how fortunate he is to be part of two families and have so many extra people in his life who care for him.

"Having an additional child in your family adds so much more to your life that I could not imagine family life without him now. When you know that they feel safe, are part of your family and unconditionally loved, it is the best feeling in the world."

Whenever I speak with my social worker, I feel understood and listened to. They see things from my point of view which means I feel so supported.

Sometimes my friends say 'You are so good to be a foster carer' and this always surprises me, because I honestly think that I am so lucky to have been chosen to care for Jason. What an honour it is!



"They really do see things from your point of view which means you feel so supported."



Jane and Meredith's story

Jane and I had been together for six years when we decided to apply to foster. It had never really occurred to us until one night we saw a program on a gay couple who fostered.

I began the search to find a fostering agency that would welcome us, and I found Key Assets Australia. After being approved as carers for a few months, Key Assets Australia approached us about caring for Mary a 4-year-old. We had previously provided respite care for Mary and knew her well. She had moved several times in foster care and we were asked if we would commit to caring for her. We were excited to be called and agreed immediately. The moment Mary arrived, Jane and I wanted to learn more about kids like Mary with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and reactive attachment disorders to ensure we can provide a stable home. It was great that Key Assets Australia supported us with lots of information via their online Care2Learn training portal and library.

Key Assets Australia offers around-the-clock support, either from our worker during office hours or via the out-of-hours service in the evenings and weekends. This support enabled us to give the best care and guidance we could for Mary.

Building a relationship with a child who has experienced abuse and trauma takes time but is an important part of her development. Five years later Mary is thriving. She is doing well at school, forming strong relationships with our family and friends, and is now building a connection with her biological family.

With the support of our worker, Jane and I realised that the only way for Mary to

experience a sense of belonging was for us to make her family an extension of ours.

Our role is to love Mary including her past, in the present and the future. Her family hears from us directly what is happening in Mary's life. Her family are happy with Mary's progress, and we have a positive relationship with them. This gives us better insight and understanding into what Mary's early years looked like. Mary has integrated so well into our family life and is now building relationships of her own, like with my parents who have just applied to become her respite carers.

We have since started to care for a very lively 3-year-old boy, James. We have contact with his maternal grandmother and his father every month. On one occasion, we took a short weekend holiday and stayed at a caravan park near his biological family. This allowed James to spend some quality time with his half siblings and grandmother. They are all lovely people and care for James deeply, but health issues and family circumstances have meant he needed to come into foster care.

Mary has taken time to adjust to James and they had their differences at first, but now she fusses over him like a little mother. James and Mary have found common ground and are now just like any other brother and sister.

We have a home with room to spare and are committed to providing Mary and James with a happy and safe childhood. We love them and want the best for them.

Frequently asked questions

Q1.

Could a child I foster share a bedroom with one of my own children?

At Key Assets Australia we prefer children to have their own bedroom and we can assess if it is appropriate for children to share, for example, a sibling group.

Q2.

Can I still go out to work and be a carer?

It is possible for carers to work as long as they are available to meet the needs of the child in their care.

Q3.

Can I choose how long I want children and young people to stay with me?

Before you are authorised as a carer we will have discussed the different types of care that are needed for our children and young people. You can decide which types of care would suit your household best. If you would prefer to offer emergency or temporary care you need to be aware that it isn't always possible to know how long they will remain with you.

Q4.

Can I choose which age group or gender I would prefer to foster?

Yes, you can. However, you are far more likely to be matched with children if you are willing to care for all ages. There is currently a shortage of carers particularly for older children, children who have high and complex needs and sibling groups of 3 or more children.

Q5.

How much will I know about the child/young person before they come to live with me?

We discuss every child or young person's needs with our carers and it is your decision as to whether to care for them. We will provide you with as much information about the child/young person and his/her background as possible, including any additional needs or behaviours. However, you do need to be aware that sometimes we have very little information, especially in an emergency. We would always, however, seek to find out information as quickly as possible.

Q6.

As Key Assets Australia is part of an international organisation do you place children from outside of Australia with foster carers in Australia?

No, Key Assets Australia only provides care for children and young people who are living in Australia and more importantly in their local area.

Q7.

What is the difference between a Non-Government Fostering Agency and the Government Child Protection Department?

The Government Child Protection Department has traditionally provided foster care in our community. Key Assets Australia offers an alternative non-government fostering service in partnership with the Government's Child Protection Department to assist and meet the high demand for fostering services. We have our own approach and staff to ensure that carers and children who are with Key Assets Australia are supported to the highest possible standard.

Q8.

Do all children have contact with their family members and significant others?

Contact with family is important for all children as it helps them to form their identity and learn about who is in their family. Visits with family members usually form part of the court order and can be several times a week when children first enter care or if their plan is to be restored to the family. All carers need to demonstrate a commitment to children and young people seeing family, where deemed to be safe and appropriate. Carers form an essential part of supporting time with family and where appropriate supervise children attending visits.

Q9.

Will I be taxed on my allowances?

The carer allowance is exempt from taxation and is not cited as income for any purpose, including yearly tax returns, applications for Commonwealth benefits or when applying for loans from financial institutions.



**“I feel grateful for such
amazing support. Thank you”
- Patrick**





What next?

If you would like to take the next step towards becoming a carer with Key Assets Australia, then contact us at:

Tel: 1800 WE CARE (1800 93 2273)

www.canifoster.com.au

*Scan to
learn more*



If you have any feedback we would love to hear from you:
feedback@keyassets.org.au



keyassets

SERVING CHILDREN, FAMILIES & COMMUNITIES

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